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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

27 January 1956

DRAFT MEMORANDUM TO THE DCI

SUBJECT: Preliminary Views on Some Questions Raised by the Dulganin
Letter of 25 January

Note: The Board has in general no serious reservations to the views expressed in the OCI comment of this date. The following remarks are largely supplementary and attempt to set this episode in the framework of our recent estimates.

Is the letter a serious diplomatic approach or is it merely a political and propaganda maneuver?

1. Whenever the USSR resorts to a bilateral action, we may be sure that it intends either to enter upon a serious diplomatic transaction or that it hopes to achieve a divisive effect upon the relations of the party approached with its allies. In this case, we are entirely confident that the USSR intended a demonstrative maneuver rather than a serious approach. This is evident from the content of the letter, which includes virtually no suggestion of any progress in the offering on concrete issues in dispute. It is even more evident from the conspicuous way in which the approach was made, it being clear that an announced approach to the President would lead to wide publicity, eventually also for the contents of the letter.

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2. We have never altogether excluded the possibility that the USSR might at some stage wish to enter upon serious bilateral discussions of some issues with the US. However, we think such a move would be carried out in the discreet fashion which the Soviets have on other occasions known how to apply when they wished to do business in a serious way. We do not believe therefore that the letter holds out any prospect that the USSR is willing to enter upon discussions in which it would alter its policy on the major issues which have been under discussion during the last year.

What Were the Soviet Motives?

3. The most important consideration in the Soviet mind was probably the desire for a dramatic initiative which would keep the "spirit of Geneva" alive, or at least demonstrate to world opinion that it is the USSR which upholds that spirit. We have estimated that the USSR intended to persist in the active "relaxation of tensions" policy on which it launched last spring. The Foreign Minister's meeting and subsequent exchanges have dimmed Western confidence in the prospect of relaxed tensions, perhaps more than the Soviets had counted on. They almost certainly regard the continuation of the mood of the Summit meeting as highly favorable to their current objectives -- a relaxation of Western defense efforts and the promotion of disunity within the Western coalition. Despite occasional reversions to cold war talk on both sides, the USSR apparently regards the "relaxation of tensions" theme as basic in its current policy line.

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4. So long as the USSR is unwilling to settle any of the major issues in dispute, the maintenance of its conciliatory posture involves certain difficulties. The results of the Foreign Ministers' meeting illustrate that. Therefore it is not implausible that the USSR should resort to new gestures as occasion requires.

5. There are a number of other immediate tactical purposes which may also be behind the move. The USSR is preparing a diplomatic campaign in West Germany; the Germans are extremely sensitive to any suggestion of US-USSR bilateral dealings and the more willing to entertain them with the USSR if they believe the US is doing so. The Anglo-American meetings about to begin in Washington offer an occasion for a new demonstration of Western unity and firmness of purpose which the Soviets may calculate can be undercut by the dramatic move they have made. The tone of the letter suggests that it may be intended mainly for a non-European audience, and thus serve to support the current Soviet campaign in the Middle East and South Asia. It is also possible that there may be domestic political purposes related to the 14 February meeting of the Soviet Party Congress.

Will the USSR Follow Up With Other Proposals?

6. It is possible, though we think it unlikely, that the USSR intends to follow up this move with others which would tend to gain plausibility from this renewed demonstration of the USSR's peaceful purposes. The

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Soviets might, for example, come forward with a proposal for cooperation toward a Middle Eastern settlement, on the basis, of course, of a neutralization of the area. It is possible that the present move could be broadened out into a revival of Molotov's proposal for a security pact between NATO and anti-NATO. It may forecast moves to contain the threat of new crises in the Formosa area and Indo-China. It may be related to the forthcoming resumption of disarmament talks and be the prelude to new Soviet efforts to get a "ban the bomb" agreement.

7. On the whole, however, we think the move is more likely to be an isolated one, intended possibly to create a favorable atmosphere in case one or another of the above issues should be taken up, but not directly linked to them. There is no suggestion in the letter of an intention to move on to other issues, and the considerations given in Paragraphs 3-5 above are probably an adequate explanation.

What Would Be the Consequences of Possible US Responses?

8. A flat-out rejection of the Soviet bid, justified simply on the ground that the US has no confidence in a renewed Soviet declaration of good intentions, would tend to support one of the principal Soviet contentions of recent months. This is that the US has been principally responsible for the retreat from the Geneva spirit and wishes to continue the cold war. The consequences of this might not be so serious in Europe, where opinion,

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except for the neutralist-minded, is probably sufficiently aware that declarations without settlements do not have much value. But in the Middle East and Asia such a US response might accelerate the drift away from Western influence and lend support to the current Soviet campaigns in those areas.

9. Acceptance of the Soviet offer could have serious consequences on two grounds. It would encourage the belief that the need for vigilance against the Soviet threat has really passed and lead to more widespread reluctance to support common defense efforts. More important perhaps, it would strike a body blow at US alliances by encouraging the belief that the US was moving toward a settlement with the USSR without full consultation with its partners.

10. An acceptance in principle subject to putting the proposed treaty on a multilateral basis would probably be the least damaging response.. It would be possible to welcome a reaffirmation by the USSR of its long-standing pledges under the UN Charter, and couple this with a suggestion that this would doubtless permit us to move on readily to the settlement of concrete issues, Germany, for example. On the whole, if skillfully handled, we doubt that the USSR is likely to profit greatly from the Bulganin letter. The time has probably passed when Soviet gestures, if not accompanied by concrete proposals, can achieve any very lasting impact. World opinion is unlikely to be as receptive and responsive now as it was a year ago.